



December 16, 2002

MARINE SAFETY UNIT HOUMA COMMAND PHILOSOPHY

(An open letter to each member of the crew)

This short document sets out my thoughts on the directions for growth of Marine Safety Unit Houma. Our success as a unit depends upon our ability to work together as a team towards common goals and objectives. As your commanding officer, I have a responsibility to set the course for those goals and objectives, and ensure you know what I feel is critical to our success. This is a broad set of standards that I embrace, that the Coast Guard as a whole has embraced, and that I expect each of you to use as your daily guide.

A PASSION FOR EXCELLENCE

We are the United States Coast Guard, built upon a long, proud history of maritime service. What we do as a service – from saving lives to stopping drugs to protecting the environment – is important. And so, be passionate about your work. Learn about our history; draw strength and inspiration from those who have come before us. Write new chapters of history for the Coast Guard of the future to look back on with pride. Let our core values of HONOR, RESPECT and DEVOTION TO DUTY serve as beacons for your lives. Likewise, enjoy trying to be the best you can, and take pleasure in a job well done. The people of America who support us deserve nothing less.

TEAMWORK

Captain Ryan (D(m)) and Captain Garrity (CO Morgan City) have expressed on several occasions their confidence in me to get the job done in MSU Houma's huge AOR. I feel their utmost confidence stems from their past experience working with you as individuals and the unit as a whole. Our continued success depends upon our ability to work as a team. Each of us has a special job to do, and a special set of skills with which to accomplish them. I will trust and rely upon you to know your trade, until you prove otherwise.

We all have more to learn. Continue to develop the technical, social, management, and leadership skills you need to be the best you possibly can. Strive for personal and professional growth. As you grow individually, all of us together grow stronger, too. Look out for each other, and keep your shipmates safe on-the-job. Strive to learn from each other. We all have something to contribute, which makes us all teachers, no matter what our rank. Honor and respect each other.

BALANCE

Balance between work and the other aspects of our lives are crucial. Each of us must be ready to answer when duty calls. That said, you also need to make time for family life, hobbies, and extracurricular interests, physical conditioning, and spiritual well-being. Stay healthy and well-rested. Make sure to take care of all the other pieces that comprise your personal world. Take time to regularly recharge your batteries, and have some fun with your shipmates, your family, and your friends.

SERVICE & INTEGRITY

We are members of a profession, which exists to serve others. We are responsible to the citizens of our country for providing the maximum benefit for each tax dollar entrusted to us. Be the consummate professional in all you do, with everyone you contact, regardless of how well they have carried out their own responsibilities to keep their vessels safe and pollution-free. Society expects, and deserves, our conduct to be beyond reproach. Our heritage demands nothing less.

GOALS & PRIORITIES

Focus your efforts toward achieving our unit goals and objectives. These goals will support the goals of the Commandant, the “M” Business Plan, and our District Commander. Work to improve the goals if necessary, but do not undermine or work around them. Remember that goals are dynamic (not TQM, but common sense): if we need to do something we are not doing, or if we need to do something differently, raise the issue.

CHANGE & INNOVATION

Change is inevitable, 9-11 is a great example that changed the way the entire country conducts its business. It is not a choice-it will happen. Don’t let it “happen to you.” Get out front and steer change, be innovative and be creative! Avoid gravitating to the status quo. Move out of your comfort zone to find new ways to do things. Learn from your previous mistakes, and from the mistakes of others. Be a player, not a fan. Train yourself to anticipate and prevent problems, and you will spend less time reacting to them. Set your own goals for personal growth. Draw from your life experiences in other areas to improve our work processes.

COMMUNICATIONS

Communications up and down the chain-of-command are vital to our success. Information is power. When you share information, you do not lose power. Instead, you enable others to gain power, which makes our unit stronger. The proper balance of information flow is crucial. Too much information can bog us down, too little information fosters ignorance and mistrust from those “outside the loop.” Listening, at all levels, is more important than talking. It shows respect for others’ opinions and an openness to learning and improvement.

CONCLUSION

Marine Safety Unit Houma is a unique Coast Guard unit, respected by the vessel and facility owners, operators, ship builders, mariners, and the general public we serve. The unit earned that respect through the top-notch professional service provided by past crewmembers. Let us challenge ourselves by setting high standards that will help us maintain the value we provide on behalf of our service and country.

I am proud to be your commanding officer, and privileged to serve with each of you. Together, we’ll write the next chapters in the Marine Safety Unit Houma saga: **let’s make it a whale of a story!**

R. W. HENDERSON